The Lenape Community

Some of the Lenape lived in large villages of two to three hundred people, but most of them lived in small bands of 25 to 50 people. There were strong ties between parents and children, and among all the related families that made up the clan.

The Lenape had three clans (or phratries) – Wolf, Turtle and Turkey – which traced their descent through the female line.  For example, if a mother belonged to the Turtle Clan, then each of her children also belonged to the same clan.  The sons had to marry women from other clans, and their children belonged to their mother’s clan.

Within their own groups, the natives were kind to one another.  They felt a sense of responsibility towards everyone in their community.  They did not steal from anyone in their own village, for there was no reason to do so.  The land belonged to the whole community, shelters were shared, and no one hoarded valuable possessions.

 Many of the groups had well-organized ways of governing their clans and villages.  The chiefs – sometimes referred to as sachems - were chosen for their behavior, skill in speaking, honesty, and ability to make wise decisions.  The chiefs also had to know about religion so that they could lead the people in rituals and ceremonies.